

## New Meijer Partnership Empowers Women-Owned Businesses

As we commemorate Women's History Month in March, there's an important milestone that we can celebrate: For the past 50 years, women have been recognized in the U.S. Census as entrepreneurs.

While there are now more than 12 million female entrepreneurs nationwide, there are significant gaps to fill in terms of equal access to capital, resources and opportunities. For example, women as a collective group still only receive 2.3 percent of venture capital and often lack the resources to get their products and services into large corporate chains.

We're partnering with Grow Hub GR and Grow Business Today to support our woman-owned vendors in earning their Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) certification.

Founded by Stephanie Kolakowski, [Grow Hub GR](#) is the first woman-owned and operated, purpose-driven business incubator hub in the Grand Rapids community. Grow Hub GR provides co-working space to local nonprofit and business professionals, along with services like business coaching, marketing and business development assistance, and workforce development.

[WBENC certification](#) opens doors and opportunities for women in business. It provides access to a vast network of support, including targeted business opportunities, increased visibility in corporate and government chains, education and development programs to spur growth and increase capacity, and networking and mentorship opportunities with thousands of female entrepreneurs and those who support them.

"In today's world, it is more important than ever that we come together to focus our energies on promoting an all-inclusive and equitable community for all," Stephanie said. "We applaud corporations like Meijer that are committed to leading social responsibility and diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. We look forward to working together to certify these women and encourage other women and minority-owned businesses who would like to have their products on the shelves at Meijer to connect with us."

Participants in the program will have access to experienced coaches and mentors throughout the journey. Businesses that are a part of this cohort will have hand-in-hand support during the 90-day process from experienced Grow Business Today consultants and our team.

We are supplementing the costs to make WBENC certification process more affordable and accessible for all our women-owned vendor partners.

"By pledging to help our woman-owned vendors become certified, we're pleased to be opening doors for them to grow not just in their partnership with us but beyond," said Kavy Lenon, Supplier Diversity Manager at Meijer.



*Stephanie Kolakowski, Founder of Grow Hub GR*